DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 259 PS 019 243

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TITLE Beyond Campus Child Care: Supporting University Families (with Excerpts from the Report of the MIT Committee on Family and Work).
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Committees; *Day Care; Dual Career Family; Early Childhood Education; Educational History; Guidelines; *Institutional Role; Marital Status; Models; Parents; *Policy Formation; *Universities
IDENTIFIERS *Campus Child Care; Elder Care; Research Results; *School Culture

ABSTRACT

This report documents the internal investigative process that was used at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to develop a model of child care and services for MIT parents which might be relevant to other institutions. Topics discussed include: (1) the history of MIT's involvement in child care; (2) the origin and charge of MIT's Committee on Family and Work; (3) the committee's data gathering activities; and (4) the committee's preliminary findings. Findings concern MIT culture; marital status, dual career families, and parenthood; child care and services for MIT parents; and elder care. The presentation of findings is supplemented by materials identifying major issues regarding work and family and discussions of the ways in which these issues are manifested in the MIT community. It is recommended that MIT should adopt a statement of principle dealing with the relation between work and personal life; make its informal policies about flexibility more explicit; clarify and improve its parental and personal leave policies; create a family and work program and council; use a broader concept of family when defining family privileges and benefits; help parents attend conferences held at MIT; and provide more housing near campus. (RH)

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ED 325259

Beyond Campus Child Care:

Supporting University Families

(with excerpts from the

Report of the MIT Committee on Family and Work)

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Running head: BEYOND CAMPUS CHILD CARE

PS 019243

Abstract

Child-care supportive policies alone have been found to be insufficient in coping with changes in family demographics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As family-related needs increase and broaden, stress has been created on existing structures. At MIT, faculty, students and staff called for a re-examination of policies, services and benefits bearing on family and work, leading to the establishment in 1988 of a Committee on Family and Work. The Committee's findings vividly reveal the need for a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of university families at this institution. This report documents the investigative process at MIT to provide a model which may be relevant at other institutions.

Introduction and Background

Universities have been involved in child care for a variety of reasons. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as at many other universities, the major reason for involvement with child care has been to enhance students' and staff's ability to participate in the life of the Institute. In the early 1970's when child care was identified as a growing need within the MIT community, reflecting increases in the number of women at the Institute, many with young children, MIT responded to that need by making quality child care more readily available.

Over the past twenty years dramatic changes have been taking place in family and workforce demographics at MIT as elsewhere, reshaping community needs. These changes involve sharp increases in the number of (1) women with children employed outside the home, (2) dual-earner couples and single-parent families, and (3) elderly dependents due to the aging of our population as a whole (see, for example, Burden and Googins [1986], Galinsky and Hughes [in press], Galinsky and Stein [1989, January], Hughes and Galinsky [1988], Kamerman and Kahn [1981], and Rayman and Burbage [1989, January]). These changes have led to an increase in the degree and scope of family-related needs experienced by community members.

In 1988, in response to a sense of new needs within its own community and to the stress created by trying to handle these needs within existing structures, MIT established a Faculty Committee on Family and Work. The task of the Committee was to gather information on the composition of the MIT community,

examine the relationship of work and family within it, and make recommendations concerning MIT policies, benefits and services.

The findings of this Committee, taken from its draft final report, place strong emphasis on the value of viewing university support for child care in the broader context of family supportive policies and services.[1] The process used by MIT to examine its work-family needs provides one model for other universities interested in doing the same.

History of MIT's Involvement in Child Care

MIT has actively supported day care since the early 1970's. Following a study of child care needs, the Institute initiated the expansion of the campus nursery school to include full day care and established a Child Care Office to coordinate a network of independent family day care homes in graduate student housing and offer child care referral services. A summer day camp for school-age children was also in place. Since that time the support system has expanded to include (1) a second child care center off-campus which includes infant and toddler care, (2) enhanced resource and referral services covering a wider array of family needs and (3) an employee flexible reimbursement account plan, which allows employees to meet qualifying dependent care expenses using pre-tax earnings.

Prior to the Committee's study, several MIT offices had begun to add programs and services designed to respond to evolving family-related needs. For example, MIT's Child Care Office had begun to significantly expand its education and support services by sponsoring parent discussion and support

groups, offering regular workshops, and developing a parent lending library on issues of child development, parenting, and balancing work and family responsibilities. The Social Work Service within the Medical Department initiated a support service to those faculty and staff members dealing with older dependents, offering consultation and information and referral to local and national resources.

However, MIT services like these have not necessarily been well-known within the community, nor have they been able to keep MIT as a whole in pace with change. A comprehensive examination was necessary.

The Committee's Origin and Charge

In June, 1988, MIT's President and the Chair of the Faculty jointly appointed the Committee on Family and Work and charged it to:

> (1) determine current demographics and related needs of faculty, staff and students; (2) review current services, policies, procedures and benefits affecting family responsibilities, and suggest ways of meeting needs better within the constraints of financial resources; and (3) suggest policies that would help harmonize family and career responsibilities at MIT, specifically mentioning tenure, part-time appointments and parental leave policies.

Committee members were chosen from all constituent groups with the exception of undergraduates, very few of whom have dependent care responsibilities. The committee staff function was filled by the administrator of the Child Care Office.

Gathering Data

Throughout its tenure the Committee met with experts from within and outside MIT to discuss services, policies, procedures and benefits. It organized discussion and focus groups to gain an understanding of the experiences of individuals from various constituent groups and of their perceptions of the issues.

The Committee developed surveys to collect demographic and quantitative data, promote awareness of current services and policies, and solicit feedback more widely.

Response rates to the surveys were generally between 35 and 50 percent for all groups except service staff.[3]

Work and Family Issues at MIT

The Committee, in its preliminary report, organized its findings into seven areas, four of which are described here: (1) MIT culture; (2) marital status, dual career families and parenthood; (3) child care and services for MIT parents; and (4) elder care.[4] Each section will identify major work-family issues and describe the way in which they manifest themselves within the MIT community.

1. The MIT Culture

The Committee found pace and pressure to be special sources of stress for parents within the MIT community.

While some survey respondents described the long hours and competitive drive as necessary to the work of a first-rate research and teaching institution, others questioned whether the pervasiveness of the high-pace, high-pressure environment was necessary, realistic, or positive. All comments, however,

reflect the stress of combining high-pressure work and family life:

> Is MIT going to make scientific research easier, less time consuming? Will they turn off the lights and send us all home at 5 PM? Will grants be awarded and tenure decisions made on the basis of the candidate's compassion or involvement in family and community affairs? Will MIT renounce the competitive spirit which fills most of modern research? Of course not. MIT is built upon our labor. Our research successes --- our grants --- are its lifeblood. Let us recognize this --- and, as individuals, our own complicity in the existence of the status quo --- and get back to work, while the Institute owns up to its responsibility to minimize the financial and logistical burdens imposed on individuals by its demands. (Postdoc)

> I cannot ask for more flexibility. It is the total amount of work that does me in. (Professor)

> Being a graduate student at MIT leaves me no time at all to even contemplate a personal life. It's kind of ridiculous. (Graduate student)

> As long as I work my 50-60 hours per week and get the job done, I can leave at 5pm once in a while. (Administrative staff)

> I love my family and value the time I spend with them. I also love my work and the time I spend in the lab. It is the great conflict of my life. I have not achieved a

satisfactory solution. Most of the anger that I carry is due to this friction. (Postdoc)

The Committee did not generally tackle the issue of pace and pressure but did identify mechanisms which currently allowed, or, if made available, would allow, individuals to better cope with existing work demands. The Committee found, as studies at other organizations have found, that the provision of work flexibility is critical to managing work-family stress.

At MIT issues around flexibility are quite different for different populations. Academics generally work long hours but have the greatest degree of freedom in scheduling work on a day-to-day basis. The need for flexibility among faculty and graduate students has more to do with the ability to vary commitments by the semester. Existing leave and part-time policies designed to provide this type of flexibility in actual practice appear relatively ineffective in doing so due to their lack of fit within the institutional culture.

The issue of flexibility is mentioned in two fifths of support staff survey comments. The data indicate a high level of interest among support and administrative staff in a variety of non-standard options, including part-time work, V-time (voluntary scheduling of additional vacation, with reduced salary which evenly distributes the loss of pay over the year), job-sharing, telecommuting (periods of scheduled work time at home), flextime (scheduled non-standard work hours) and comp time. Each one of these options with the exception of V-time is in current use

somewhere at MIT, although none are generally available or widely understood.

Staff comments also describe the difficulties of coping with non-regular family needs and emergencies, such as school conferences, snow days, or a child's illness. Access to this type of flexibility is heavily dependent on having a supportive supervisor. Staff whose supervisors offered flexibility in meeting these unplanned or occasional family needs expressed tremendous gratitude; staff with unsupportive or inflexible supervisors, on the other hand, described stressful and frequently unworkable situations.

Staff comments reveal considerable tension over the wide differences which exist in the way formal policies regulating flexibility are applied. A number of comments expressed anger about the perceived lack of fairness (in both directions) in the way individual supervisors made decisions relative to parents and non-parents. The comments revealed a general perception within the community that women have a more difficult time gaining positive recognition from supervisors, and that this is even harder for women with children. Supervisors for their part indicated a strong desire for more guidance in making these complex decisions.

2. Marital Status, Dual-Career Families and Parenthood

For faculty who become parents, as for staff, an official option for managing the stress of the first few months is a personal leave or part-time work, which in the case of pretenure faculty, slows down or freezes the tenure clock. For graduate

students, no formal policy exists allowing either leave with guaranteed re-admission or part-time study at reduced tuition. Students in good standing are routinely readmitted following short leaves, and petitions for part-time study at reduced tuition have been accepted for pressing personal reasons. Many faculty and graduate students were unaware of what was officially and unofficially allowed. More strikingly, the Committee found that most felt unable to make use of leave and part-time policies because what was officially allowed by policy differed from what it was felt would be tolerated by the community, or, in the Committee's words, that "the culture overrides the rules".

Faculty and graduate students pointed to the following factors as making it unlikely they would consider taking personal leave to care for a new child, ranked in the same order by both groups: financial considerations; getting behind in research; and a sense, felt more strongly by women than by men, that it would be held against them by their department (70% of female compared to 45% of male faculty). Faculty were also concerned that taking personal leave to care for a new child would be resented by colleagues (30% of women and 20% of men).

The Special Assistant to the President testified to the Committee that she knew of no woman faculty member who had taken personal leave to care for a new child and then been granted tenure. Pretenure faculty women who <u>were</u> granted tenure after having children at MIT "had mostly made arrangements with their department head to focus on a subset of their responsibilities

for all or part of a term, often (but not always) by being relieved from teaching."

The Committee wrote:

> One view of these facts is that taking personal leave is fatal to tenure aspirations, as a number of survey comments say. Another view is that the prognosis is poor for a faculty member whose relation to the department administration is so formal that she can get some relief while keeping up with her graduate students and research only by taking formal personal leave.

Committee discussions, though lively on the issue of the family-restrictive impact of pace and pressure, did not address performance standards and expectations. Rather, the Committee searched to identify options which could offer academic staff additional flexibility to respond to family needs while at the same time permit them to better fulfill work expectations in keeping with the culture of the Institute. Several faculty comments described the usefulness of specialized semesters with relief from teaching. Comments from graduate students revealed an interest in leaves and part-time study. Both faculty and graduate students reported that changing the hours they spent at work was helpful or necessary in managing the arrival of a new child.

The Committee also looked at how the rigours of academic life at MIT affected personal choices regarding family and career and found a disturbing trend toward childlessness among women and men in dual-career families.

Demographic data indicate that married women at MIT are much less likely than married men to be parents (only a third as likely if they are graduate students, two thirds as likely if they are administrative staff or faculty). Women who are mothers were found to spend more time on childcare and household tasks and consequently to have less time free for work than women who are not mothers, and than men who are fathers. However, when both wife and husband work, MIT men are much more likely to share household responsibilities equally with their spouse (40% of men in two-career families compared with only 4% of men in single-career families) and are showing a trend toward increased childlessness more like their female counterparts. "The striking result...is that in all eight groups, fatherhood for a two-career man is only half to three-quarters as likely as fatherhood for a one career man..."

From these and other findings on the stress of combining academic careers at MIT with family responsibilities, the Committee drew the following implications for hiring faculty:

> If in fact the fraction of two-career faculty members increases, the data suggest that the number of people who combine parenthood and professorships at MIT will decline. There is little room for an increase in the fraction of two-career young faculty women, already at 85%, but an increase in two-career male faculty appointments seems likely for two reasons. First, the percentage of two-career relationships is higher among the postdocs and graduate students than in the faculty. Second, 37% of the male faculty under 45 and

only 28% of the male faculty over 45 are in such relationships now.

There is, however, another explanation for both these observations. It may be that (1) a number of male graduate students and postdocs in two-career relationships are differentially avoiding academic appointments, or at least MIT academic appointments, because they want to have children, so that there are fewer two-career males among the new assistant professors than among the postdocs and graduate students, and (2) the demands of an MIT pretenure appointment are such that the young males in two-career families who have been entering the MIT faculty either (i) have no children, or (ii) don't get tenure, or (iii) their spouse substantially reduces her professional commitment, and they become a one-career family.

It is not possible to choose among these explanations from our one time-sample. No doubt both hold to some degree...In any case, none of the explanations is appealing to members of a two-career couple who intend to stay that way and want children. One result may be a serious drop in the number of people available to MIT and other competitive universities to replace the coming wave of faculty retirements. Another may be that it is impossible to raise the percentage of women on the faculty from the current level of 10% to the 20% level in the graduate school, let alone the 35% level among the undergraduates.

3. Child Care and Services for MIT Parents

The Committee looked at how people at MIT currently met child care needs, at the problems they were experiencing in the areas of affordability, availability and quality, and at community use of MIT child care related services.

> All three staff focus groups...reported that child care frequently became a significant problem for employees. The topic elicited descriptions of employees who bring children to work, use their own sick leave to care for family, spend work time monitoring children by telephone, and request flexible working arrangements in order to manage child care responsibilities. Statements by supervisors and employees indicated that child care difficulties increased stress, reduced productivity, and led staff to look for work elsewhere. Employees' child care responsibilities and difficulties were seen by some administrative and support staff to jeopardize job and career advancement and by others to elicit favored treatment, in both instances creating stress for the employee, colleagues, and supervisor.

Data from the survey detail the combinations of child care arrangements used; strikingly, only 7% of MIT parents with children under age 13 (and only 3% of faculty parents) have a spouse or partner who provides all the child care. Although the vast majority of MIT families use non-parental child care, roughly half full-time or nearly full-time, forty-two percent also cover a portion of their work-related child care need by juggling their own and their spouse or partner's work schedules,

some no doubt by choice, others perhaps due to financial constraints or to the lack of suitable care.

Although child care in the Boston-area is relatively well-developed, the search for an available slot to match a specific need and preference created "great difficulty" for nearly a fourth of parents of preschoolers, and shortages in infant and toddler care and in care for school-age children created "great difficulty" for 45% and 33% of parents respectively. Parents at MIT were generally aware of MIT-affiliated programs, although less clear about the specifics of what was offered and frequently discouraged frommaking contact due to the perception that they generally have no openings. MIT's campus center has a waiting list of one to two years, and the Child Care Office reports that it typically lists few or no infant-toddler openings. Occasional and emergency care is also very difficult to find, except in some locations where care is available through agencies at very high cost.

4. Elder Care

The Committee also sought information about adult dependent care and found that somewhere between 15 and 20 percent of faculty and staff have had significant responsibility for the care of an adult dependent at some point over the last five years. A fourth of this group found their responsibilities to constitute an ongoing major demand on time, while half found them so during some period of crisis.

There was widespread interest in a variety of services related to adult dependent care, including consultation services

and workshops providing information on aging parents, dependent care services, and medical and legal issues related to adult dependents. Awareness of existing MIT resources in the area of elder care was low.

Recommendations for Responding to Work-Family Needs

The Committee's two year study of work-family issues identified many specific areas in which change could enhance the balance of work and family life. The Committee wrote:

> In its own interest, these are not problems which MIT can ignore. About half of our faculty, graduate students and staff with children under 13 have thought about leaving MIT because of conflicts between work and family: about a quarter of the men and a third of the women have given that possibility serious consideration. If the other universities now dealing with these issues make it easier to combine work and family life than MIT does, they will attract graduate students and academic staff who would otherwise come here. If universities as a whole do not change significantly, they may find it even harder to compete for faculty and staff with the industrial laboratories, some of which are ahead in this sphere. We believe that there are steps which MIT can and should take to help its community minimize stress and maximize productivity by harmonizing work and family life.

The Committee drafted twenty eight recommendations in eight general areas. The recommendations identify specific policies,

services, and benefits as well as the mechanisms seen as necessary for bringing about change, and reflect the Committee's attempt to be sensitive to the constraints of financial resources. The following summary, outlining each of the eight areas, clearly shows the direction and purpose of the recommendations; much more detail is presented in the Committee's report.

1. MIT Should Adopt a Statement of Principle Dealing with the Relation Between Work and Personal Life

The Committee made the adoption of a statement of principle its first recommendation because it felt official expression of MIT concern with work and family issues was necessary to make each of the other specific recommendations effective.

2. MIT Should Make its Informal Policies about Flexibility More Explicit

The Committee recommended that MIT make its informal practices allowing flexibility more explicit and generally available, with particular reference to semesters of relief from teaching or research for faculty, leave and part-time study for graduate students, a variety of flexibility options for staff, and a program of consultation and training for supervisors.

3. MIT Should Clarify and Improve its Parental and Personal Leave Policies

The Committee recommended an increase in the job-protected parental leave period from 8 to 18 weeks with a standard period of pay established for normal childbirth under the disability policy. The Committee recommended that leaves also be granted to

employees facing other major family responsibilities such as family illness, or caring for older relatives.

4. MIT Should Create a Family and Work Program and Council

The Committee recommended the establishment of a Council on Family and Work to "track...needs, perform evaluations and make recommendations, about dependent care and other family and work areas, creating a coherent and evolving MIT program of activities on family and work". The Committee identified four of the most urgent tasks for the Council's initial program, which were: "part-time care for infants and toddlers, programs of adequate quality for school age children, affordable child care, and a visible consultant on elder care issues".

5. MIT Should Use a Broader Concept of Family in Defining Family Privileges and Benefits

The Committee recommended that MIT maintain its pro-child benefits stance, and that it move carefully and in stages in the direction of offering family-related services and benefits to encompass a broader population including couples "in relationships approximating marriage" and to dependent children "for whom the employee has a responsibility approximating guardianship, adoption or step-parenthood".

6. MIT Should Help Parents Attend Conferences Held at MIT

The Committee recommended an official policy requiring groups running meetings with advance registration at MIT to offer assistance with child care arrangements as a signal of the level of commitment the Institute has to this issue.

7. MIT Should Provide More Housing Near Campus

The Committee recommended a variety of additions to the MIT housing stock and a pension loan program to assist with the costs of home ownership.

8. Steps that can be Taken to Implement the Recommendations

The Committee outlined the administration of the two major new initiatives in its recommendations, flexibility training and the work and family program. It also detailed a number of somewhat independent concerns which had come to its attention.

Conclusion

The same impulse which led MIT to become involved in child care twenty years ago has resulted in the creation of a Committee on Family and Work in order to "suggest ways in which MIT can make it easier to combine work and family life, (and) to help MIT continue to attract the best people and enable them to work with improved productivity and morale."

The collection of demographic data provided the Committee with compelling evidence of dramatic change within its community and help in predicting the impact of policy and benefits changes being considered. The personal testimony gathered from community members vividly portrayed the diversity of needs and experiences with combining work and family responsibilities and added urgency to Committee deliberations. Many individuals expressed gratitude that MIT was concerned enough to listen, and offered long and thoughful contributions. As a result of its thorough investigations the Committee can offer MIT compelling reasons to consider significant and comprehensive change.

Many of the individuals now involved in the development of new family-supportive services and policies at MIT and elsewhere are those who also worked to develop support for university child care at their institutions. It is hoped that this description of MIT's activities will reach them and prove useful to their efforts.

Footnotes

1. At the time of this writing (8/90) the Committee had not yet made a formal presentation of its findings and recommendations, which were still in draft form. This paper makes use of the preliminary versions of the Report of the MIT Committee on Family and Work Part I: Summary and Recommendations, and Part II: Analysis of Survey Findings. Any quotations not otherwise attributed in this report are from this document.

The full draft report and eventually the full final report are available to interested readers by contacting MIT's Information Center, Room 7-121, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139.

The Chair of the MIT Ad Hoc Committee on Family and Work is Peter Elias, Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, under whose leadership and with whose authorship the committee report was produced. Committee members are Lotte Bailyn, Dianne L. Brooks, M. Clare Brown, Phillip L. Clay, Manuel Esguerra, James A. Fay, Suzanne Flynn, Donna M. Kendall, and Jenny Lee McFarland.

2. MIT includes roughly 5,000 undergraduates; 4400 graduate students; 1,000 faculty; 1800 academic staff; 2200 researchers; 1400 administrative staff; 2100 support staff; and 1800 service staff.

3. Respondents to the short survey were divided into eight groups for analysis. Response rates to the short survey were at

or near 55% for support staff, administrative staff and faculty, and 42% for research staff, 34% for postdocs, and only 15% for service staff. Respondents to the long survey, due to the smaller sample, were put into three larger groups for analysis. Response rates to the long survey ranged from 48% among the academic group to 39% of staff and 34% of graduate students.

4. Findings in three areas seem less readily generalizable and have been omitted from discussion here. These are: living arrangements; benefits; and income and housing. The section of this paper covering Committee recommendations does, however, summarize all recommendations made and thus offers a reflection of major findings made in these three areas as well.

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